

- (a) receiving a request for the cryptographic service from a user utilizing the network, wherein the request is received by a cryptographic service provider;
- (b) generating a contract based on a variable pricing scheme in response to the request; and
- (c) sending the contract from the cryptographic service provider to the user utilizing the network.

2.(amended) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the cryptographic service provider selects one of the one or more cryptoservers to perform the cryptographic service.

3.(amended) The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the cryptographic service provider is a commercial service competing for customers.

4.(amended) The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the one or more cryptoservers is part of a single distributed service.

5.(amended) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the variable pricing scheme is based on at least one of a data load of the one or more cryptoservers during performance of the cryptographic service, a distance between the one or more cryptoservers and the user, a congestion of the network during performance of the cryptographic service, and a rating of the one or more cryptoservers performing the cryptographic service.

6. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the variable pricing scheme is auction-based.

7. The method as recited in claim 6, wherein the cryptographic service provider receives bids for performing the cryptographic service from the user.

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8.(amended) The method as recited in claim 6, wherein the one or more cryptoservers bid for providing the cryptographic service.

9.(amended) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the cryptographic service provider is one of the one or more cryptoservers.

10.(amended) The method as recited in claim 3, wherein the cryptographic service provider provides a receipt upon performing the cryptographic service, wherein the receipt includes at least one of a one-way hash of the results of its computations, the time and duration of the computations, a description of the computations, and the identities of the one or more cryptoservers and the customer.

11.(amended) A computer program embodied on a computer readable medium for pricing a cryptographic service on a network utilizing one or more cryptoservers, comprising:

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- (a) a code segment that receives a request for the cryptographic service from a user utilizing the network, wherein the request is received by a cryptographic service provider;
  - (b) a code segment that generates a contract based on a variable pricing scheme in response to the request; and
  - (c) a code segment that sends the contract from the cryptographic service provider to the user utilizing the network.

12.(amended) The computer program as recited in claim 11, wherein the cryptographic service provider selects one of the one or more cryptoservers to perform the cryptographic service.

13.(amended) The computer program as recited in claim 11, wherein the variable pricing scheme is based on at least one of a data load of the one or more cryptoservers during performance of the cryptographic service, a distance between the one or more cryptoservers and the user, a congestion of the network during performance of the cryptographic service, and a rating of the one or more cryptoservers performing the cryptographic service.

14. The computer program as recited in claim 11, wherein the variable pricing scheme is auction-based.

15.(amended) A system for pricing a cryptographic service comprising:

- (a) a network;
- (b) one or more cryptoservers for providing a cryptographic service;
- (c) logic that receives a request for the cryptographic service from a user utilizing the network, wherein the request is received by a cryptographic service provider;
- (d) logic that generates a contract based on a variable pricing scheme in response to the request; and
- (e) logic that sends the contract from the cryptographic service provider to the user utilizing the network.

16.(amended) The system as recited in claim 15, wherein the cryptographic service provider selects one of the one or more cryptoservers to perform the cryptographic service.

17.(amended) The system as recited in claim 16, wherein the cryptographic service provider is a commercial service competing for customers.

18.(amended) The system as recited in claim 16, wherein the one or more cryptoservers is part of a single distributed service.

19.(amended) The system as recited in claim 15, wherein the variable pricing scheme is based on at least one of a data load of the one or more cryptoservers during performance of the cryptographic service, a distance between the one or more cryptoservers and the user, a congestion of the network during performance of the cryptographic service, and a rating of the one or more cryptoservers performing the cryptographic service.

20. The system as recited in claim 15, wherein the variable pricing scheme is auction-based.

21. The system as recited in claim 19, wherein the cryptographic service provider receives bids for performing the cryptographic service from the user.

22.(amended) The system as recited in claim 19, wherein the one or more cryptoservers bid for providing the cryptographic service.

23.(amended) The system as recited in claim 15, wherein the cryptographic service provider is one of the one or more cryptoservers.

24.(amended) The system as recited in claim 20, wherein the auction-based variable pricing scheme is conducted securely as a cryptographic protocol by some of the one or more cryptoservers.